

The Fruit of Christ's Resurrection

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John 20:19–31 · Church Postil (Lenker edition)

19 Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 20 And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hands and his side. Then were the disciples glad, when they saw the Lord. 21 Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you. 22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: 23 Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. 24 But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. 25 The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. 26 And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. 27 Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. 28 And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God. 29 Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed. 30 And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: 31 But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name. John 20:19-31

[1] The first part of this Gospel lesson is the same narrative we heard in the Gospel for Tuesday after Easter. The incident occurred on the evening of Easter, called by the Evangelists the first Sabbath, when Christ appeared for the first time to his frightened disciples, as they all with the exception of Thomas were assembled, and comforted and strengthened them in the faith of his resurrection. Thus we hear again what the power and benefit of Christ's resurrection are, namely, that Christ, when he comes with such a sermon, brings peace and

joy; and these are the true fruits of faith as they are mentioned among the other fruits of the Spirit by St. Paul in Galatians 5:22.

[2] For when he comes he finds his disciples still sitting in fear and terror both from without because of the Jews and from within because of their consciences, and yet very weak and slow of heart to believe, although they had heard from the women and some of the disciples that he had risen from the dead. But while this saddened their hearts and they were talking with one another about it, behold, Christ appears and hails them with the friendly greeting after the Hebrew custom, “Peace be unto you!” which means in our language, to wish one everything good. For we call that peace where all goes well, the heart is contented, and prosperity reigns. This is the joyful message Christ always brings with him, as he repeats it the second and third time in this narrative.

[3] But this Peace of Christ is very secret and hidden from the eyes and the senses, for it is not of the nature that the world pictures and seeks, or as flesh and blood understand. For Christians can for the sake of Christ never expect any peace or any good from his enemies, the devil and the world. They must daily suffer misfortune and contention, for they are alarmed and afflicted and harassed by the devil with the terrors of sin and its punishment, by the world with its persecution and tyranny, and by the flesh with its own weakness, impatience, etc. Hence this is not a visible or tangible peace, consisting of bodily feeling, but an inner and spiritual peace, consisting in faith, which grasps and holds fast to nothing but what it hears in our text, namely, these gracious Words of Christ, which he speaks to all frightened and troubled souls: “Pax tibi; Peace be unto thee. Fear not” etc. And such a Christian, therefore, is contented and satisfied with having Christ as his friend and with having a gracious God who desires his constant welfare, even though, materially speaking, he has no peace in the world, but constant strife and contention. This is the peace of which St. Paul speaks in Philippians 4:7: “The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus,” and of which Christ says in John 16:33: “These things have I spoken unto you, that in me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation,”

[4] For the devil will not allow a Christian to have peace; therefore Christ must bestow it in a manner different from that in which the world has and gives, in that he quiets the heart and removes from within fear and terror, although without there remain contention and misfortune. And this we see in the example of these disciples of Christ, who are in great fear on account of the Jews; they are behind barred doors, not daring to go forth, and are in

constant dread of death. Although they have peace without and are annoyed by no one, nevertheless their hearts are all aflutter, and they have neither rest nor peace. While they are thus in fear and terror, the Lord enters; he quiets their hearts and brings them peace, not by removing the danger, but by quieting their hearts. For the wickedness of the Jews is neither removed nor changed thereby, for they are as full of hatred and rage as before, and without there is no change whatever, but within the disciples are changed, they have become courageous and bold, and the hatred of the Jews is for them now of but little concern.

[5] This is the true peace, which is able to calm the heart, not in time of good fortune, but in the midst of misfortune, when without there is nothing but contention. For here is the difference between worldly and spiritual peace. Worldly peace consists in removing the external evils which cause the contention, as for example, when enemies besiege a city, there is war, but when they are gone, peace returns. Thus also, when poverty and sickness are pressing thee, thou art not contented, but when they are removed, and thou art rid of the misfortune externally, thou art again at peace and rest. But he who endures this is not changed; he remains just as discouraged when these things exist as when they do not, the only difference being that he is feeling it and that it oppresses him when it is present.

[6] But with the Christian or spiritual peace we find just the opposite conditions, namely, that the evils without remain, such as foes, sickness, poverty, sin, the devil, and death. They are ever present and are surrounding us; nevertheless there is internal peace, strength and comfort in the heart, so that the heart does not concern itself about misfortune, yea, is even more courageous and joyful in the presence than in the absence of misfortune. It can therefore indeed be called a peace, which passeth all understanding. For reason understands and seeks no other peace but that which comes from without through possessions which the world can give, but which knows not how to quiet and comfort the heart in times of need, when all else fails. But when Christ comes, he does not change the outward unpleasant conditions, but strengthens the person, and makes out of a timid, a fearless heart, out of a trembling, a bold heart; and out of a disquieted, a peaceful, quiet conscience, so that the person is courageous, bold, and joyful in the midst of those things in which otherwise all the world is terrified; that is, in death, terror of sin, and all distress, in which the world with its comfort and possessions can render no help. This, then, is a true and constant peace, which remains forever and is invincible as long as the heart clings to Christ.

[7] Hence, this peace is nothing else than that the heart is certain that it has a merciful God and the forgiveness of sins, for without this it can neither stand in the time of need and danger, nor be satisfied by any earthly fortune.

[8] But this takes place and is accomplished only when Christ shows us his hands and his side; that is, when he shows us through the Word how he was crucified for us and shed his blood and died, in order that he might pay the debt of our sins and reconcile and avert the wrath of God. This is the sure token that comforts the frightened conscience and heart and gives assurance of divine grace and forgiveness of sin. These he shows, so that they may never doubt, but be sure that it is he himself, who is not angry with them, but is their dear Savior; for this peace is not so easily grasped by them nor by any troubled consciences, as long as they are terrified and in the conflict. Therefore he comes and strengthens them both with the Word and with visible signs.

[9] This he still does constantly after his resurrection, not visibly but through the voice of the ministry, which we are to believe, even though we do not see him, as he also says at the close of this Gospel, through which he also shows how he shed his blood for us; for it is indeed sufficient that he showed this once to his disciples, to strengthen their and our faith and to show that he is truly risen and is the same Christ who for our sakes was nailed to the cross and pierced.

[10] Therefore, the second thing which follows the friendly greeting of Christ, or the offering of peace, and the showing of his hands and side, if it is received by faith, is called joy, as the text says: "The disciples therefore were glad, when they saw the Lord." For it is indeed the greatest joy the heart of man can experience, again to see and recognize Christ, who had been dead to him before, and with whom all comfort and joy had fled; and when he can now again have the joyful comfort in him, and know that he has in him a dear Savior, and through him has found grace and comfort with God against all the terror of sin and death, and against the power of the world and of hell. This is what St. Paul means in Romans 5:1: "Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; through whom also we have had our access by faith into this grace wherein we stand" etc.

[11] Of this we sing also at this season in the old Easter hymn on the resurrection of the Lord: "Christ is risen from all his pangs," for we are not only told of the story of his resurrection, but it is also brought close to us, and we are told to rejoice in it as our treasure and salvation, through which we have peace and every good gift from God. For how could we rejoice in him,

if we had nothing of him nor appropriated as our own possession that which he has done for us. Therefore he also wishes to teach us that Christ is our comfort, and this comfort we should surely obtain and desire no other on which we can depend in every time of need. For through his resurrection he has conquered all and bestows upon us as our own all that he has done and suffered.

[12] But from the fact that Christ comes to the disciples through the door that is closed, we are to learn that after his resurrection and in his kingdom here upon earth he is no longer bound by bodily, visible, tangible and worldly things, as time, place, space and the like, but that he is to be recognized and believed in as one who through his power can reign everywhere, who can be present with us at all places and at all times, when and wherever necessary, and who will help us without being taken captive and hindered by the world and its power.

[13] In the second place, he also shows that wherever he comes with his government and rule, through the office of the Word, he does not come with a great noise, with storm and commotion, but very orderly; not changing nor breaking anything in the outward affairs of human life and government. He simply permits these things to remain in their condition and office as he finds them, and governs Christendom in a way that orderly government is neither abolished nor weakened upon the earth. Thus he does not derange and displace anything in man, neither his senses nor his reason; but he illuminates and changes for the better his heart and reason.

[14] The devil, on the contrary, disorganizes and ruins everything through his factious and disturbing spirits, his ratling and boisterous servants, in the external and worldly government and life as well as internally in the hearts of men, whom he really makes insane and blind by his evil spirits, as we now have experienced with his insurrectional prophets, fanatics, and Anabaptists.

[15] This the first part of this Gospel treats of how Christ comforts and gladdens his dear disciples through his resurrection, and resurrects them, together with himself, from the heavy death and sorrow of their hearts, in that Christ was now lost and eternally dead to them. And as they now have this benefit and fruit, and in order that this power and comfort of the resurrection be made known to others, he continues and gives the command to spread the same in the world through their office, as we read: II. The Government and Office of the Keys Christ Instituted "Jesus therefore said to them again, Peace be unto you; as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them and saith unto

them. Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.”

[16] The Lord shows with these words what he accomplished through his resurrection, namely, that he established a government, which shall have nothing to do with money and gold, or anything that pertains to the temporal life, or how we are to acquire and keep them. For such a government already existed, being established from the beginning of the world, and being made subject to the reason of man through the Word of God, as he says in Genesis 1:28: “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” This is the ancient government, in which the worldly power legislates and executes, for which the Holy Spirit is not needed, and concerning which little need be taught in Christianity. Jurists may counsel and help as to how that shall be carried on.

[17] But in addition to this there is another government, which is above the conscience and is concerned with things that relate to God. This government is of two kinds: One was founded by Moses, and the other the Lord established here, when he said: “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you,” etc. The government of Moses is to serve to the end that it may teach us what sin is and what sin is not, and it belongs to those who neither know nor feel sin, as at present the Antinomians who say the law need not be preached. It is fruitless to teach much of grace among these people, for if the law is not preached, we cannot know sin, as St. Paul says: “Without the law sin is dead,” which means where no law is, there is no transgression; for sin, no matter how great it may be, and the wrath of God, are known only through the law. Therefore, when the law is not preached, the people become perfect heathen, and think they do right, although they sin grossly against the commandment of God.

[18] Worldly authority indeed may punish and restrain open sin; but it does this too little, though it take to its aid all the books of the jurists, in order to illustrate or teach what sin is before God. Therefore the law is given that people may learn from it what is sin. Where sin continues unknown we cannot understand, much less desire, forgiveness and grace. Yea, even grace itself is then of no avail, for grace should fight and conquer in us against the law and sin, that we despair not. Just as a good physician must be experienced in his profession, first to know the nature of the disease, for otherwise, if he wishes to help the patient without knowing the cause of the sickness, he might give him dangerous poison instead of helpful medicine. Thus sin must first be known and experienced before we can preach grace. But the

law is needed to gain such a knowledge, and it is necessary to instruct the people in the catechism, and diligently to teach them the ten commandments. For, as I have already said, human reason with all its wisdom and all the skill of the jurist, is unable to gain this knowledge. And although there is implanted into it a little of this knowledge, yet this is too insignificant; therefore God established the preaching of the law of Moses, which he had first received from the patriarchs.

[19] Such preaching Christ himself instituted, when he commanded his disciples, as we have heard in the last Gospel lesson, first to preach repentance in his name; and John 16:8 says: “The Holy Spirit will convict the world in respect of sin” etc., for although it really belongs to the government of Moses to expose sin, nevertheless, that Christ may come to his government and work the beginning must be made by preaching the law where there is no consciousness of sin; for where that is not done, sin cannot be forgiven.

[20] The other government or kingdom is that founded on the resurrection of Christ, for thereby he desired to establish a new kingdom which has to do with sin that has been awakened by the law, and with death and hell. This does not teach us anything about marriage, the household, the rule of a city and country, how to preserve the worldly peace, how to build and plant etc., but its aim is to show us where we may abide when this temporal, perishable kingdom and existence have passed away, when we must leave behind possessions, honor, home, farm, world and all that is upon the earth, together with this life, as we expect every moment. Now to this end has been established the kingdom of Christ, who is enthroned therefore as an eternal King, that he is Lord over sin and righteousness, over death and life. His kingdom has to do with, and to rule over, these things. This is what the Lord means when he says: “Receive ye the Holy Spirit: whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained.” Here you can see that his object is to deliver the people from sin, or to permit them to remain in sin, and show that they are condemned.

[21] Certainly, we cannot say that he has thereby founded a worldly kingdom, as the pope boasts of his power of the keys, that he has the power to loosen and to bind even that which is not sin, yea, even that which Christ neither binds nor loosens, thereby making of it a worldly power. But Christ shows clearly enough here what his keys are, namely, they are not to make laws and abolish them again, as the pope is doing, but to remit or retain sin. He wishes to say: For this purpose shall my kingdom exist: First, that people may become conscious that they are

sinner. This I have commanded Moses to teach, not for the purpose, however, of binding them, for they are indeed already bound; neither for the purpose of creating sin nor having anything to do with created sin, as the pope through his commandments and with his power of the keys is doing, creating sin where there is no sin: but for the purpose of dealing with those transgressions which naturally are sins against the commandments of God, as for example, despising God and unbelief, blaspheming his name, despising his Word, disobedience etc., which are indeed not sin by virtue of the commandments of the pope, but sins in truth, which are ingrained into the flesh and blood of man, which cannot be absolved nor removed through the loosing key of the pope as he uses it, but remain in man until he is in his grave.

[22] It is the purpose of the kingdom of Christ that we may know now how we may be freed from sin. It is, therefore, called not a temporal or earthly kingdom, but the kingdom of heaven; for it shall just commence when this temporal kingdom ceases through death, in order that the people may know how they shall then reach heaven. This kingdom, he says, shall begin and continue thus: “As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you.”

[23] With these words he takes away from his disciples first their carnal mind, which they still possessed after his resurrection, that he would, like a temporal King and Lord, rule and reign with external and carnal power. Therefore he says: You have now seen what kind of an office I have filled upon the earth, for which I was sent by my Father, that I should establish a spiritual kingdom against that of the devil, sin and death, and thereby to bring them that believe on me to eternal life. This I have now done, and finished it as far as my person is concerned, and have not taken upon myself anything of a worldly character and rule. Yea, I have also been put to death by the world because of this my office and service, and am separated from it, but now through my resurrection I have entered into that glory where I shall reign forever over all creatures at the right hand of my Father. Therefore I send you also forth in like manner to be my messengers, not to engage in temporal affairs, but to conduct the same office as I have hitherto filled, namely: to preach the Word you have heard and received from me, an office through which people are delivered from sin and death, who experience sin and death, and wish to be delivered from them.

[24] By means of this office the apostles and their successors are exalted also as lords unto the end of the world, and there is given to them such great authority and power as Christ, the Son of God, himself possessed, in comparison with which the power and dominion of all the world

is nothing (although before the world it neither resembles nor is called dominion). And yet this office shall not and cannot extend further than over that alone which before God is called sin; so that wherever sin begins and works their government or rule shall also begin and work, and everything that lives and is called human upon the earth, shall be in subjection to their rule, whether it be emperor or king, great or small, no one is excluded. Therefore he says: “Whose soever sins ye remit.” This “whose soever” means nothing else than that all are included, Jews, Gentiles, great and small, wise and ignorant, holy or unholy; that no one shall enter heaven and come to eternal life, except he receive it from you, that is, through the office which you have received.

[25] For they all are also subject to and concluded under sin through these words, by which he shows that upon earth they shall find nothing but sin, and he pronounces the judgment, that all mankind to whom the apostles and their successors shall be sent are sinners and condemned before God in their person and life, and that one of two things must take place: either their sins are forgiven, if they confess and desire forgiveness, or they must remain eternally bound in sin unto death and condemnation.

[26] Now in order to exercise and accomplish the end of this authority and government, special power is required that is not human but divine. Therefore he does not give them swords and weapons, neither does he equip them with armor and worldly power, but he breathes on them and says: “Receive ye the Holy Ghost,” namely, they are to know that such an office and work cannot be carried on in their own strength, but in his power through the Holy Spirit, who operates through their office and word; and it shall thus be the office of the Holy Spirit, who is given for this purpose by Christ, that although the message seems but weak, and nothing more than a weak breath out of the mouth of man, yet such power shall be exercised through it, that sin, God’s wrath, death, and hell must yield to it.

[27] For this we can also easily give an answer, if anyone should ask and critically question how can man forgive sins, since this belongs to God alone? For it is indeed true that it is not in the power nor ability of man, nor of his merit and worthiness, to forgive sins, even though he were as holy as all the apostles together and all the angels in heaven. Therefore we condemn the pope himself with his monks, who promise the people forgiveness of sins by virtue of their own merit, works and holiness, and give them absolution, and thus shamefully deceive the poor people, who long for true and sure comfort.

[28] But here we must make a true difference, which the papists and their rabble neither know nor can give, namely, between that which man is able to do by his own power and worthiness, and that which is commanded to be done in the name of Christ, and which he accomplishes through his power. It avails nothing, to be sure, when a barefooted trickster comes along and undertakes to give absolution and forgiveness to a poor conscience by virtue of his own sorrow and repentance, and the merits of the saints and his order, as indeed their indulgences read (of which they can be convicted through the letters of their brotherhood which they have sold to the people): “The merits of the sufferings of Christ and of Mary, the blessed Virgin, and all the saints; the merits of this severe and grievous order, the humility of thy repentance and sorrow of heart, and all good works that thou hast done or shalt do, shall serve thee to the forgiveness of thy sins and eternal life,” etc. This is indeed nothing else than fearful blasphemy of Christ, and the perversion of the right absolution, for even though they remember his sufferings, yet they are not sincere in it, for they do not consider it efficacious enough for the forgiveness of sins, but must add the merits of Mary and of the saints, and especially of their own order and monkish doings and put them on an equality with Christ’s sufferings. This they do without any command from Christ; yea, against his Word and command. This is not from the Holy Spirit, but from their own spirit, the devil, who is the father and founder of this false doctrine.

[29] But for the absolution to be right and efficacious, it must spring from the command of Christ, which is as follows: I declare thee free from all thy sins, not in my own name, nor in the name of any saint, nor for the sake of any human merit, but in the name of Christ and by the authority of his command, who has commissioned me to say to you that all your sins are forgiven, hence, not I but he himself by his own mouth forgives thee thy sins, and thou art under obligation to receive this and believe it firmly, not as the word of man, but as if thou hadst heard it from the lips of the Lord Christ himself.

[30] Therefore, although this power to forgive sins belongs to God only, we should nevertheless know that he exercises and imparts this power through this external office, to which Christ has called his apostles, and commands them to proclaim in his name forgiveness of sins to all who desire it. Sins, are forgiven, therefore, not by human will and power, but by the command of Christ, for this purpose he then also sends the Holy Spirit, namely, in order to forgive sins.

[31] God also does this for our welfare, so that we need not look up to heaven in vain, when we receive it not, and be compelled to say as St. Paul does, when he quotes Moses: “Who shall ascend unto heaven?” etc. But he does this that we may have the assurance of it, he has placed the forgiveness of sins in the public office and the Word, in order that we may continually have it with us, upon our lips and in our hearts. There we shall find absolution and forgiveness, and we know that where we hear this message proclaimed to us by the command of Christ we are bound to believe it as if it were announced to us by Christ himself.

[32] Behold, such is the authority given through this office of the apostles to the church which extends farther and higher than all the authority upon earth, that without it no one, and it matters not how great and mighty he may be, shall come nor can come to God, nor have the comfort of conscience, nor be free from God’s wrath and eternal death. For although all emperors and kings were to concentrate their might and power, their money and possessions, they could deliver neither themselves nor any human being from the least sin, for if the heart of man is intimidated, what matters it whether he be a mighty king or emperor? What did it help the great and mighty king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon when he became insane, so that he was rejected by his people and had to lie with the irrational beasts of the field and eat grass, and nothing could help him except that the prophet Daniel had to absolve him from his sins?

[33] But who can express what an unspeakable, mighty and blessed comfort it is that a human being can with one word open heaven and lock hell to a fellow mortal? For in this kingdom of Grace Christ has founded through his resurrection, we do indeed nothing else than open our mouth and say, I forgive thee thy sins, not on my account, nor by my power, but in the place of, and in the name of, Jesus Christ, for he does not say: ye shall forgive sins on your own account, but: “I send you, as my Father hath sent me.” I myself do not do this of my own choice or counsel, but I am sent by the Father. This same commandment I give to you unto the end of the world, that both ye and all the world shall know that such forgiveness or retaining of sin is not done by human power or might, but by the command of him who is sending you.

[34] This is not said alone to the ministers or the servants of the church, but also to every Christian. Here each may serve another in the hour of death, or wherever there is need, and give him absolution. If you now hear from me the words, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” then you hear that God wants to be gracious to you, deliver you from sin and death, and make you righteous and blessed.

[35] Yea, you say, thou hast indeed given me absolution, but who knows whether it is certain and true with God that my sins are forgiven? Answer: If I have done this and said this as a man, then thou mayest well say: I do not know whether thy absolution is effective and efficacious or not, but that thou mayest be sure concerning this, thou must be instructed in the Word of God, that thou canst say, I have been absolved neither by the minister nor by any other man; for thus the minister has not taught me to believe: but God has spoken and done it through him; of this I am sure, for my Lord Christ has commanded and said: As my Father hath sent me, so also send I you. Here he indeed puts those to whom he gives the command on an equality with himself, because they are sent by him to accomplish that for which he is sent by God, namely, to remit and retain sins. There it rests and that does it, otherwise, without such a command, absolution would amount to nothing.

[36] If thou, therefore, art sad and worried on account of thy sins, and art afraid of death, with which God eternally punishes sin, and thou hearest of thy minister, — -or if thou canst not have access to him, — -of a Christian neighbor comforting thee with these or similar words: Dear brother or sister, I see that thou art timid and in despair, and fearest the wrath and judgment of God on account of thy sins, of which thou art conscious, and on whose account thou art terrified — listen to me and let me announce to you, Be of good comfort and cheer, for Christ thy Lord and Savior, who came into the world for the sake of sinners in order to save them, has given the command through the public office to his called servants, and wherever necessary, to everyone in particular, that one is to comfort another for Christ's sake, and in his name acquit him of his sins. I say, when thou therefore hearest this comfort, then receive it with joy and thanksgiving, as if thou didst hear it from Christ himself; then thy heart shall indeed be at peace, established and comforted, and thou canst then joyfully say: I have heard a man speak to me and comfort me; for the sake of himself I did not believe a single word, but I believe my Lord Christ, who has established this kingdom of Grace and forgiveness of sins, and has given this commandment and authority unto men to remit and retain sins in his name.

[37] Therefore every Christian when the devil attacks him and suggests that he is a great sinner, and he must be lost and condemned etc., should not long contend with him or remain alone, but go or call to him his minister, or any other good friend, lay his difficulty before him, and seek counsel and comfort from him, and remain firm in that which Christ here declares: "Whose soever sins ye remit etc.," and as he says in another place: "Where two or more are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," and whatever this person says

to him in the name of Christ from the Scriptures, let him believe it, for according to his faith it shall be done unto him. For two or more come together in the name of Christ when they converse with one another, not on temporal things, how money and riches may be acquired or gained; but on what would be of service for the salvation and happiness of their souls; as for instance, when thou art in the confessional or anywhere else art making known thy weaknesses and temptations, and he to whom thou art disclosing it sees that Moses through the law has thee in a dilemma; that thy sin is oppressing thee; that death is alarming and frightening thee, and thou groanest and complainest concerning thine own life, so that even words like these are apt to fall: Oh, that I had never been born, or, Oh, that God would prolong my life, I would amend my life, etc.

[38] If then thy pastor of anyone else begins to comfort thee, not in a worldly way nor for the sake of money, but because he sees thou art in anxiety and fear of sin and death, and says to thee, Let everything go that is upon earth — -money, goods, everything that pertains to man, and pay now attention to this; thy heart is indeed in great pangs and asks: Can I be freed from my suffering, misery, and evil conscience? How can I escape Moses with his fearful threats? I say, listen to him when he speaks to thee in this manner: I say to thee in the name of the Lord Christ, who died for thy sins, that thou art to permit thyself to be comforted, to believe and be sure that thy sins are forgiven, and that death cannot harm thee.

[39] Yea, my dear brother, you say, how wilt thou prove that this is true? Answer: Christ our Lord said to his disciples and to entire Christendom: I command and bid you, that ye shall forgive and retain sin. Whatever ye do then in this, ye do not of yourselves; but because ye are doing it at my command and bidding, therefore I do it myself. Therefore thy minister or pastor as the one who cares for thy soul (Seelsorger), or any Christian in such a case is called for and sent to comfort thee. And because he is seeking only the salvation of thy soul, thou art, therefore, bound to believe him as though Christ were standing there himself and would lay his hand upon thee and speak the absolution.

[40] Behold, this is the way we deal with sins, retaining or forgiving them. Besides this there is no counsel nor help for them; as the pope pretends to do with his false doctrine, points the people to their own works or sufficiency, tells them to go into cloisters, to Rome, to the saints, torture themselves, build churches, heavily endow cloisters, hold mass, etc. This is indeed not the right way. Thou canst indeed employ thy going, money, and works in a better manner. Here the matter is entirely different, as has already been said. For when Moses comes with his

fearful threats, that is, when he through the law reveals to thee thy sins and shows how great and many they are, and brings thee into great fear and despair, when thou art no more in the great, wicked, and hardened multitude, but with the little flock, which realizes and feels, its misery and despair, and would therefore indeed be frightened even at the rustling of a leaf, then this is the only help: I, I have founded, says Christ, the kingdom of Grace. It shall consume and destroy sin and death, and bring to light righteousness and life.

[41] Therefore do not say: Where shall I find this? Shall I go to Rome or Jerusalem for it? Not in this way; yea, even if thou couldst ascend to heaven, and if possible on a golden ladder, thou couldst accomplish nothing; but it must come thus: give heed to his Word and command when he says: "I send you," etc., as if he wanted to say: I must first come to you to announce to you the will of my Father through the Gospel; institute the holy sacraments: and absolution. You should not come to me in a different way. But since I cannot be bodily at all places in the whole world, and shall not be visibly present with you always, I will do as my Father hath done. He took a small corner of the earth, namely, the land of Judea, to which he sent me, that I should be a preacher there; I traveled through Galilee and Judea; so much I could accomplish personally; I preached the Gospel to the comfort of the poor sinners among the Jewish people, healed the sick and raised the dead etc. This, you will notice, was the work entrusted to him. For this purpose he was sent by the Father. There he was found, not in the courts of kings among the debauchers, not with Annas, Caiaphas, and other holy, rich, and learned people; but among the blind, lame, lepers, the deaf, the dead, and the tempted, the poor and afflicted sheep. To this he brings help for soul and body. He brings to them the most costly treasure, which no one has, much less can give, unless he receives it from him, namely, righteousness and salvation. And thus, he says, ye shall also do at all places wherever ye go, and to this purpose I send you, that ye shall run as my messengers through the entire world. And besides you and after you I will ordain others who shall run and preach, as I sent you, even unto the end of the world, and I will continue to be with you that ye may know that it is not you who are accomplishing this, but I through you.

[42] From this command we also have the power to comfort the sorrowful consciences and to absolve from sin, and we know that, wherever we exercise this office, not we but Christ himself is doing it. Therefore every Christian, in this case as well as when he hears the Word preached in the pulpit, should hear the same, not as the word of man, but as the Word of God himself; then he can indeed be sure and need not doubt a moment that he has the forgiveness of sins, for Christ has established through his resurrection that whenever a called servant of

the Church, or someone else in the time of need, absolves his neighbor who is distressed and desires comfort, it shall count as much as if Christ had done it himself, because it was done at his command and in his name.

[43] Therefore, when two deal thus with each other they are gathered together in the name of Christ, for, as we have said before, none is seeking the money or goods of the other, as the servants of the pope are doing, who speak to the sick and say: My dear man, the time is at hand when thou must die. Where shall thy possessions go? Think of thy poor soul and give a portion to us and we will pray to God for thee, and do much with it afterwards etc.; instead he ought to speak to the sick and say: This is no time to be occupied with your money and property, let others care for that. I see very well thy heart is despondent and terrified; thou art wrestling with doubts and canst not help thyself nor deliver thyself; but Christ has established upon the earth a comforting and blessed kingdom, when he says: "As my Father hath sent me, so send I you." He has consecrated us all to be priests, in order that one may proclaim to the other forgiveness of sins. Therefore I come to thee in the name of this our blessed Lord Christ, and tell thee not to be so despondent and terrified as though there were no comfort, help, and counsel any more to be had. Dost thou not hear what Christ says, that he came for the sake of the sinners, not the righteous, to save them? Therefore be at peace, receive these glad tidings with joy and thank him for them most heartily, that he permits me to announce to thee without any trouble and expense on thy part; yea, he even gives command to the effect that thy sins are remitted. Therefore I absolve and make thee free from all thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. To this thou shalt reply joyfully: I thank thee, merciful God, thou heavenly Father, that thou hast forgiven me my sins through thy dear Son Christ; and do not doubt that thou art surely absolved by God the Father himself.

[44] From this you can see that this paragraph concerning the office of the keys does not at all confirm the tyranny of the pope, but it is there for the purpose, not that thou makest me, or I thee, rich, nor that I be thy Lord and thou my subject, as the pope, the arch-rogue and denier of God, indeed is making out of it worldly pomp and power; but that I can come to thee, when thy conscience is worried, to help and counsel thee in thy last hour, or at other times, and say: Power, money, honor and goods, everything must be set aside; we have now only to speak of the kingdom of Christ — only through this and through nothing else must thou be helped from sin and death.

[45] This signifies indeed not an external and worldly dominion or power but a service, for I am seeking nothing from thee, I want to serve thee and bring thee a great and precious treasure, but not gold and silver; because thy heart desires to be comforted and to have a merciful God in heaven I come to thee and bring thee this joyful message, not of my own will or choice, but at the command and commission of Christ, who says: "Come unto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Also, "Whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven," or as he says in this connection, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them."

[46] Cannot this be called a service and the gratuitous bringing of an unspeakable, heavenly, eternal treasure, which neither thou nor the world can purchase with all its possessions and riches? For what are all the treasures of the world and all the crowns of kings, gold, silver, precious stones, and whatever the world counts great in comparison to this treasure called the forgiveness of sins, through which thou art made free from the power of the devil, of death and of hell, and art assured that God in heaven will now be gracious unto thee, and gracious in a way that thou shalt be his child and heir, and the brother and joint-heir of Christ, for the sake of Christ? Therefore it is impossible to sell such a precious treasure for money, or to purchase it with money, as our Judas Iscariot, the pope, has done. This treasure must be given and received gratuitously or thou art not helped by it, for the gift of God cannot be purchased with money. Acts 18:20.

[47] But this I say not to the end that people shall give nothing to the servants of the Church, who teach God's Word in its truth and purity, as, alas, they are eager to do, and many are ready to begrudge their minister every bite, and, if they could they would rob the possessions of the Church and ministers, and prove by their actions that they would gladly starve out their ministers and get rid of them. But what a wild state and calamity would follow, would be soon experienced, if the government did not intervene. Nay, this is by no means my meaning. Your pastors should be properly supported, for if they have nothing to eat, drink and wear, and for their other needs, they cannot very long fill their office, for they would have to think on how to support themselves in other ways. Thus the Gospel would not continue long, and it is this that the devil is seeking through these people.

[48] But that we are under obligations properly to support our pastors is also stated by Christ himself, when he says in Luke 10:7: "The laborer is worthy of his hire." As St. Paul says in Galatians 6:6: "But let him that is taught in the Word, communicate unto him that teacheth,

in all good things,” adding in verse 7 a sharp word, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked,” and in 1 Timothy 5:17: “Let elders, or priests, that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the Word and in teaching.” We support others, who are engaged in worldly offices, in which they serve the public, in order that they may be able to perform their service. How much more do we owe it to them that serve in the Word of God, as St. Paul says, they are “worthy of double honor.”

[49] And in order that the doctrine of the Gospel may remain pure in our pulpits in the future, and that our posterity may retain and hear these doctrines, we are not only bound properly to support those who serve the Church, but we must also with all diligence see to it that our schools are supplied with competent teachers, who should also be properly supported, so that the people may be trained to become not only common ministers, who are simply prepared to instruct the Christian congregation in the Word, but learned men, who will be capable of contending against the rabble and factious spirits. To this end it is the duty of everyone to contribute willingly and cheerfully, not alone the princes and lords, but also the citizens and peasants.

[50] From what has been said each one can see for himself what a great and precious treasure it is to hear the Gospel or the absolution in its true meaning from the preacher or pastor. If he comes to thee in the time of sickness and comforts thee, then thou canst be assured that Christ the Lord himself visits and comforts thee. For no one could possibly come to thee in this capacity without divine commandment, and he would know neither how to help nor to counsel; but since thou hearest that he himself has commanded it, thou canst be fully assured and say joyfully: Here Christ himself comes to me in my confessor, for he does not speak his own word, but the Word of God, to do which he is sent, and the command to do it he has.

[51] Here thou hast then sure support against the terror and despair of conscience. Thou dost not need to float and bob in uncertainty, as the doctrine of the pope would teach us, which never absolves anyone from sin unless he has been sorry enough and confessed enough until he is clean. There was not the least thought about faith and the power of the keys as instituted by Christ, for such doctrines and knowledge was so completely unknown that I myself, a Doctor of Divinity, who should indeed have known better, did not hold and teach differently than that my sins were forgiven, if my penitence and confession were sufficient. But if our sins are not forgiven, before we outweigh them with our sorrow, penitence and good works, we can never hope to receive forgiveness. For I can never come to the conclusion that my

sorrow and repentance have been sufficient; hence, no man, be he called pope or anything else, is able for that reason to absolve or acquit me.

[52] In this manner the conscience has been lamentably misled from the Word of Faith and the commandment of God to their uncertain sorrow and repentance, through the falsehoods of the pope. This has brought a large income, and from it have been built many churches, cloisters, chapels, altars, that are richly endowed. Yes, there are still extant bulls and letters of the pope that refer to this, and confirm these things, through which he has deceived the world woefully, so that it is impossible to estimate much less to describe the damage and the sorrow that have arisen therefrom. For this reason we are faithfully and constantly admonishing, and let him who can help so that we may maintain schools, ministers and pulpits that such or worse error may not increase among us, as the devil indeed desires.

[53] This is the true doctrine concerning the kingdom of Christ and the office of the Keys, and if we act accordingly, then we will remain Christians, and are prepared for everything in our relation to God and man. We will also heartily thank God that he has delivered us from the constraint and tyranny of the pope, who made out of the power of the Keys a mere show and worldly dominion, although they were established and ordained by Christ to help the whole world obtain a treasure that cannot be bought with money.

[54] Let us therefore be truly grateful to our dear Lord and Savior, who through his resurrection founded this Kingdom of Grace, which is established for the purpose that we should constantly find therein for all our needs and anxiety sure help and comfort. And we need not go very far for this precious treasure, nor do we need to secure it at any great expense, for he has given command and full power to his apostles and their successors, and in case of need to every Christian, even unto the end of the world, that they should comfort and strengthen the weak and discouraged souls, and should remit unto them their sins in his name etc.

SOURCE

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